



Chris Danou's Capitol Report

Celebrate Workers With Labor Day

With another Labor Day behind us, I thought it would be a good time to share some thoughts, lessons and reflections about this American holiday. While Labor Day marks the end of summer with a day off of work for most people, it does have its history and meaning to our culture. Labor Day has been recognized for well over 100 years and is meant to celebrate the achievements of working people and what they have contributed to our country.

But in a year when workers and their value to our communities have been assailed, it is important to remember that we all benefit from the work of teachers, police officers, firefighters, road crews, public health nurses, snow-plow drivers and so many other laborers. Our lives are affected every day because of the labor of workers. Each year, on the first Monday in September, Labor Day is our chance to thank them for their service to us and our communities.

Labor Day was first recognized in New York City in the early 1880's as a way to honor those, "who from rude nature have delved and carved all the grandeur we behold." Many other cities and states joined the tradition and in 1894 President Grover Cleveland made Labor Day a national holiday.

Even though Labor Day was recognized as a national holiday, working conditions for most people were nothing short of horrendous and unimaginable by today's standards. People worked twelve hours a day, six days a week without any benefits. Unemployment compensation and worker's compensation for those injured on the job were nonexistent. Some people even lost their lives from extreme conditions without the necessary rules and regulations we expect today.

It was through years of fighting that the worker achieved things we hold to be commonplace today – an eight hour workday, five day work week, the weekend, safe working conditions, worker's compensation and unemployment insurance. These all seem pretty basic in today's standards, but there was a time, not that long ago, when these were absent from the lives of the American worker.

Not only did the worker create lasting effects in the workplace but they also helped build our nation. Through their efforts, the United States became the most prosperous nation in recorded history, established the highest standard of living and brought strength, leadership and freedom to our economy and our people. We truly live in a better country because of the fruits of their labor and efforts of the American worker.

I hope you took a moment to reflect this Labor Day and remember the worker and their contributions to our society such as the eight hour workday, five day work week, worker's compensation, unemployment compensation and safe working conditions. Let's draw inspiration from these past successes as we work together to move our state forward for Wisconsin's working families.